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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, INR/NESA/NAP

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TAGS: [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: On the Edge of the Arab World Morocco Joins in the Fray

Ref: Casablanca 903

Classified By: Principal Officer Douglas C. Greene for Reasons 1.4
(b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: As the fighting between Israel and Lebanon hits the one month mark, anti-American sentiments in Morocco's largest city are strong, and getting stronger. On Sunday, August 6, Casablanca witnessed a well-organized protest with tens of thousands of Moroccans marching in solidarity with Lebanon. The leaders of the march added their voices to those already calling for boycotts of American products. The demonstration, and others like it coordinated by Islamic parties and organizations, have left Casablanca's moderates feeling isolated and concerned about the country's future. End Summary.

"All United Against the United States"

¶2. (C) In the last month, the U.S. Consulate in Casablanca has been the setting of sit-ins, protests and rallies, sometimes more than one a week. To date, the largest demonstration in the city was on Sunday, August 6, when approximately 45,000 Moroccans, according to our security contacts, marched to express their solidarity with Hizballah and their strong anger at the U.S. Originally planned to occur in a district away from the Consulate, the march ended nearer than expected. Photos of the march appeared on the front page of nearly every Moroccan newspaper. "L'Economist," a widely read, French language newspaper printed a large color photo of an American flag being trampled during the march. It also reported U.S. flags being burned (reportedly more than Israeli flags) throughout the day. Marchers carried banners with anti-American sentiments such as, "Stop the terrorism of the United States" and "The Butchery of Qana is an American Crime, Executed by the Israelis." People waved portraits of Che Guevara and even Saddam Hussein while chanting "Allah, Allah, we are all Hizballah."

¶3. (C) The march was organized by The Association for the Support of the Struggle of the Palestinian People and The Moroccan Action Group to Support Iraq and Palestine, and supported by the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) and the Organization for Justice and Charity (JCO). The aim of the march was to demonstrate solidarity with the Lebanese, but it was also a call for support of Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah. During the march, Nasrallah was hailed as the "hero" of the Arab people who "fights for dignity and liberty." Photos of women, most of whom wore headscarves, and children carrying signs that stated, "We are all Hizballah, we are all militants" appeared throughout the media.

14. (C) In a conversation with poloff, a longtime local employee of the Consulate claimed, "Nasrallah use to be wild and out of control and the Israelis were calm, now it's the opposite. Nasrallah is making sense and winning over all who thought he was an extremist." Two former Moroccan International Visitor participants echoed the sentiment during a recent lunch with PAO and CAO. "Shi'a Hassan Nasrallah has acquired the status of Gamal Abdul Nasser because he has stood up to Western powers" one of the participants declared.

Calls for Boycotts Abound

15. (C) At the end of the three hour march, Abdelilah Benkirane, of the PJD, delivered a speech in which he congratulated all the participants for "answering the call" and demanded a boycott of all American products. A similar demand was made recently by the National Trade Union of the Moroccan press, which called for "Moroccan civil society organizations and the Moroccan media to boycott all the activities of the American Embassy and of the institutions related to it." A well-known Moroccan comedian asserted, during the demonstration, that "the American products that should be boycotted are not food and drink but the Arab regimes (they keep in power)."

16. (C) There have been some indications that the calls for boycotts are having a limited impact. We were forced to cancel an upcoming special International Visitor Program (IVP) for female Moroccan union leaders of Casablanca. All but one of the ten invitees of the much-anticipated program called to cancel or declined the offer to participate. Some stated up front that they would not be involved in a program sponsored by the USG at this time, while others claimed the program was ill timed and conflicted with scheduled union elections. We later learned that the Directors General of a number of the unions told the potential participants they were not to take part in any program sponsored by the USG. Along the same lines, American businesses are starting express some concern. Recently, one of the larger American companies in Morocco, Proctor and Gamble, contacted the Consulate's Foreign Commercial Service Office in anticipation of possible problems after seeing their name surface on one of the boycott lists.

None Safe from Criticism

17. (C) As expected, the U.S. and Israel were the main targets of condemnation during the August 6, march, however, the GOM did not escape unassailed. According to the French Language daily, Le Matin, spontaneous chants of condemnation of the Moroccan government exploded throughout the march. The paper was also very critical of the lack of participation by members of the government. (Note: It is surprising that Le Matin, normally pro-regime, was so critical of the GOM and its officials. End Note)

Consulate Contacts Speak Out

18. (C) Some of our contacts have been very candid about their feelings and concerns regarding the situation and are eager to deliver their message. Mohamed M'Jid, activist, anti-Islamist, and president of the Moroccan Foundation for Youth, Initiative, and Development, said during a lunch on August 3, that "Just as in Lebanon, where Israel is planting the seeds of terrorism, so the seeds are being planted here as well." M'Jid said there is "major unhappiness" in Morocco and that people are watching pan-Arab television, and are focused on the situation. Another contact, Nouzha Skalli, outspoken advocate for reform and Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) parliamentarian, pulled the Consul General aside during "Throne Day" celebrations to make an impassioned statement about what she sees this war doing to moderates in the region. Her concern, a concern shared by others to whom we have spoken, is that, due in part to recent regional developments, "extremists and Islamists are gaining influence at the expense of the moderates" insinuating that there will be a reversal of the progress Morocco has

made in recent years as Islamists gain support.

¶9. (C) Meanwhile, in a very open and frank discussion, longtime Consulate Moroccan employees told us that most Moroccans are preoccupied with the war. One employee is convinced that "this situation legitimizes terrorism in the eyes of Arabs." He is concerned that Morocco is now experiencing the worst anti-American sentiment in decades and, somewhat dramatically, asserted that "it will take generations to get past what we are now experiencing." The sharpening of comments we hear is unusual. Events in the Middle East, far from Morocco on the western edge of the Arab world often meet with subdued reactions here. During a conversation, several months ago a number of university students told poloff that they were sick of hearing about Palestine. "We have problems of our own," they complained.

Loss of Credibility

¶9. (C) Moderate political activists in Casablanca have expressed concern that the U.S. is losing its standing in the region (reftel). Some worry that the U.S. has lost what little credibility it had remaining as a "neutral" mediator in the "Middle East peace process." One Moroccan who participated in the protest told us afterwards, "The U.S. should no longer preach for democracy in the Arab world, while being unjust towards the Arabs, and unconditionally supportive of the Israelis, while openly encouraging their butcheries." "How can they preach democracy," he continued, "when Hamas, which was elected democratically, is being condemned by the entire West?"

Comment

¶10. (C) Moroccan reaction in Casablanca is more than meets the eye. With 2007 parliamentary elections coming up, anti-American demonstrations and rhetoric are useful to Islamist parties like the PJD. Their intentions are twofold: while the anti-American slogans and demonstrations help to broaden their base, they simultaneously damage the position of the moderate parties, which support democratic reform.

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